

# Strategic Alliances for Sustainable Visitation

## NPS National Tourism Strategic Plan



### TOURISM VISION

The mission of the National Park Service has, from its origin, been inextricably linked to the tourism community. The "visitor enjoyment" envisioned and fostered by our founders correctly anticipated a Service which delivers relevant, high-quality visitor experiences which support our broad conservation mission through the creation of enduring physical, emotional and intellectual connections to park resources and the American legacy they represent.

People who perform tourism functions in the National Park Service at park, regional and national levels have complementary roles in working with a wide range of tourism interests and adjacent communities, and in enabling NPS leaders to be proactive partners with the tourism community locally, nationally and internationally. They foster an informed dialogue with the tourism community which provides value through establishing common ground, shared interests and principles, successful collaborations, and strong working relationships to effectively manage and promote the National Park System.

Our staffs effectively exchange information among community and business partners and colleagues within the National Park Service to ensure a greater mutual understanding and the development of better management, education, business and sustainable practices. This collaborative work includes topics such as park visitation, visitor orientation, education and interpretation, and the use of new technology. Over time, this results in a diversity of visitation which better mirrors American society and which corresponds to the carrying capacity of park units. Additionally, a better informed public enhances our ability to properly manage and protect park resources, improves visitor satisfaction, and encourages safer visits.

Through these and other collaborative avenues, an appreciation for the breadth of the American heritage represented in the National Park System is created and strengthened with the tourism community, park visitors, and the American public.

## TOURISM STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The National Tourism Council (NTC) recommends six strategies dealing with tourism community outreach, information exchanges at various levels with partners and the public at large, strategic visitation, quality visitor experience, and field orientation/cultural adaptation. These strategies are expected to significantly contribute to the implementation of the **Centennial Initiative** and the **Interpretation and Education Action Plan**.

**Strategy 1. Engage Community Partners** – Connect gateway communities, parks, and tourism partners to proactively identify and address areas of common interest.

### Strategic Community Engagement Actions

**a.** Actively engage partners in strategic forums involving the tourism community at all levels.

#### *Tasks:*

- Represent, present NPS updates at the major tourism forms at local, state, regional, and national levels. Share information obtained at these events with the Service. Nationally, examples include Travel Industry of America forums, National Tour Association Convention, National Parks Hospitality Association, Sustainable Tourism Congress, Southeast Tourism Society and Western States Tourism Policy Council.
- Keep the Directorate informed on strategic issues developed from the various tourism forums. Provide staff support for the Director's activities as a member of the National Tourism Policy Council.
- Represent and present park specific updates at local and regional tourism forums, sharing information over a two-way communications channel between the park staff and tourism partners.

**b.** Build sustainable partnerships with professional organizations, gateway communities and academia on the basis of shared interests and the ability to leverage resources.

#### *Tasks:*

- Develop and implement partner agreements which leverage resources to support tourism programs and projects in parks.
- Develop an elective pilot project in each region with an academic institution to craft a joint marketing plan for a park. Use PMIS (20% fee funds) where applicable.

**c.** Enable NPS managers to engage proactively with tourism partners and gateway community stakeholders in joint tourism projects using best visitor management tools.

*Tasks:*

- Establish a challenge grant fund for parks to obtain financial resources for cooperative marketing projects which demonstrate return on partner investment.
- Identify and implement at least one pilot project per region to demonstrate proactive co-op practices.

**Strategy 2. Improve Communications and Marketing Capacity –**

Establish and maintain an exchange with tourism community partners, NPS, the American public and international guests capitalizing on the promise of a high quality experience.

Strategic Marketing Communications Actions

**a.** Invest in research to better understand our current and prospective visitors with emphasis on youth and other underserved populations.

*Tasks:*

- Conduct qualitative studies to inform message content; gain an understanding consumer values, motivations, and emotional needs with respect to travel and park visitation.
- Confirm the key words and phrases that move consumers, particularly in targeted demographic groups, to take action and retain impressions of park experiences.
- Use research results to segment the general audience for thematic and activity preferences and demographic sorts.

**b.** Position the NPS brand by creating memorable connections between parks and visitors which will highlight the richness, breadth and promise of national parks and experiences associated with visiting parks.

*Tasks:*

- Advance the NPS Messaging Project as part of the development of a comprehensive communications plan.
- Team up with national partners, the Ad Council and other agencies to create awareness of parks experiences as a central tenet of enjoyable recreation (eg. Get Outdoors, It's Yours! Campaign).
- Select and implement a pilot project to demonstrate brand positioning with targeted audiences (e.g. connecting Latino families to national parks).
- Mobilize a national, regional, and park level media effort among public affairs staffs to proactively generate feature stories and media familiarization tours. Sponsor NPS scientists for Stanford's Leopold program

c. Provide tourism partners with information about conservation and heritage values and responsible visitor use, so that together we communicate consistent messages and reliable information to current and prospective visitors.

*Tasks:*

- Team up with NPS Conservation Study Institute, Conservation oriented think tanks, academic institutions, to provide content and delivery of conservation messages for tourism partners.
- Encourage parks to develop their individual messages tailored to their specific situation and partner availability.
- Enhance and build on the ‘Crown of the Continent’ GeoTourism pilot to instill a sustainable conservation ethic in tourism marketing partnerships.
- Explore and share with parks other models where tourism and sustainable conservation are in harmony.

d. Track and share trends, issues, and perspectives with park professionals and tourism community partners.

*Tasks:*

- Collect relevant content from primary and secondary NPS and partner research and synthesize the most relevant information. [e.g. sources: TIA Research Series and Marketing Outlook Forum, Yankelovich Tourism Monitor, various academic peer reviewed studies]
- Develop a tool for interactive dialog with consumers on nps.gov
- Monitor and contribute to relevant online travel discussion forums.
- Deploy communication strategies for short notice announcements and messages such as emergency route detours, changes in park access.

e. Use most appropriate technology and communications channels to reach respective audiences with NPS tourism messages.

**Strategy 3. Create Innovative Visitor Enhancement Strategies** – Define and apply proactive strategies to address visitor distribution, capacity, and marketing communications.

Strategic Visitor Management Actions

a. Expand visitation by extending traditional seasonal expectations and targeting potential visitors who prefer to travel during off season and shoulder periods.

*Tasks:*

- Perform a capacity analysis of parks using technical review teams to identify prime opportunities for managed use.

- Offer technical assistance to parks highlighting innovative strategies for capacity utilization.
- Highlight good models for visitor management tools which demonstrate proactivity and leadership in cooperative engagement.

**b.** Create park and gateway marketing strategies to match consumer interests and needs.

*Tasks:*

- Design and execute pilot projects demonstrating demographic targeting techniques.
- Working with gateway community partners, develop and integrate content, distribution, and marketing communication of authentic park stories in support of parks and the Centennial Initiative.

**c.** Ensure accurate and relevant park stories of experiences for all—with special emphasis on connecting with lapsed users and underserved demographic populations.

*Tasks:*

- Develop a database of key stories associated with each park which can be echoed and amplified by gateway community partners and for matching with target audience preferences.
- Expand on a pilot conducted by the NPS Interpretation Chief to be given to gateway community partners for inclusion in their customer education programs.

**d.** Build marketing cooperatives, based on commonality, between parks, and other attractions related by geographic proximity, experiential activities, or by common story theme.

*Task:*

- Identify and complete pilots, one for each co-op type. [Examples include CW150, presidential sites and libraries, Underground Railroad, buffalo soldiers, voluntourism, fossil freeway, Mississippi River Trail, Grand Circle.

**Strategy 4. Ensure Quality Visitor Experiences** – Increase visitor satisfaction. Proactively elevate visitor expectations and fulfill them through high quality customer service.

Strategic Quality Visitor Experience Actions

**a.** Build an expectation that visiting parks opens doors to a wide spectrum of life-enriching experiences which lead to repeat visits, referrals, volunteerism and philanthropy.

*Tasks:*

- Shape the message to appeal to experiential values; highlighting a path toward a long term commitment to stewardship.
- Develop ways to craft the message by engaging existing park visitors in regular listening sessions.

**b.** Promote an integrated ethic among tourism partners and park staff to inform visitors about a full range of opportunities within the park as well as at partner attractions in the destination region.

*Tasks:*

- Incorporate aspects of a SuperHost program which institutionalizes return and referral customer dialog as part of staff training and orientation programs.
- Advocate for and participate in a joint park and gateway customer service training program with emphasis on invitation to repeat, refer, and volunteer.

**c.** Provide practical comprehensive trip planning and useful pre-site orientation visitors.

*Tasks:*

- Collect and distribute case studies demonstrating the use of technology tools in trip planning and pre-arrival orientation.
- Integrate safety and responsible use messages as part of visitor pre-education communications.
- Find a way to use and maintain the Discover America's National Parks web content (being replaced on [discoveramerica.org](http://discoveramerica.org)) to retain its trip planning properties.
- ✓• Induct OCIO Web Communications Strategist into the National Tourism Council (NTC).

**d.** Coordinate destination planning into park plans so that facilities and visitor communications on both sides of park boundaries reflect the brand promise and values, creating a holistic 'sense of arrival.'

*Task:*

- Highlight model examples where park and contiguous local communities have integrated their planning efforts.

**Strategy 5. Ensure Professional Excellence**– Cultivate, nourish, support, recognize, and celebrate a visitor centric ethic that supports quality visitor experiences throughout the Service. Anticipate, relate and adjust to changes in visitor needs and preferences.

### Strategic Professional Excellence Actions

**a.** Provide technical assistance in tourism and marketing to park managers and other park professionals.

#### *Tasks:*

- Conduct a park needs assessment through the NTC.
- Develop pilot projects demonstrating consultation tools which address visitation challenges and opportunities.

**b.** Develop and distribute case studies which offer examples of best practices, creativity, innovation, and partnership successes.

#### *Task:*

- Feature these examples on other tourism web sites, newsletters, and forums.

**c.** Provide incentives and peer/park recognition programs which salute achievement in proactive tourism partnerships.

#### *Tasks:*

- Post the more compelling stories in a special collection on Inside NPS to raise awareness for an internal audience.
- Design and implement a delivery system for getting these stories to external audiences where tourism partners can join in celebrating a park success.

**d.** Develop tourism training modules to be incorporated into NPS training courses, particularly NPS Fundamentals, superintendent training, and across all park functions.

#### *Tasks:*

- Develop tourism competencies.
- Establish training modules consistent with tourism competencies.
- Develop a tourism training module for NPS Fundamentals course by 12/01/08.

**Strategy 6. Finance Implementation and Execution of the Plan**—Carry out the plan elements by tapping the marginal increase in visitor-provided revenue over and beyond an appropriated base.

### Strategic Funding Actions

**a.** Ensure an enduring, base-funded NPS tourism program to carry out the plan.

#### *Tasks:*

- Secure ongoing ONPS tourism program funds not easily allocated to marketing projects. [3FTE (Chief, tourism analyst, administrative support), trade shows, collateral materials, NTC support]

- Enhance base funding by leveraging resources and park stewardship through partners in support of parks.

**b.** Create a dedicated funding source which matches marketing investments with revenue gains for parks and park stewards.

*Tasks:*

- Research and demonstrate the nexus between marketing strategies and revenue enhancement.
- Present projects showing how parks can apply this return-on-investment model.

**c.** Enhance both fixed appropriated funds and variable dedicated funds by leveraging with tourism partners and stakeholders in cooperative projects.

*Task:*

- Propose and test targets for ideal leveraging ratio

**d.** Leverage variable dedicated funds with partners in joint branding communications where both brands are compatible and mutual interests are supported.

*Tasks:*

- Research potential pool of compatible partners and present co-branding criteria and scenarios to NTC and NPS leadership.
- Design and execute a project that demonstrates how a broad branding message can be communicated in common by NPS and a compatible national partner.